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ANECDOTES OF THE LIFE OF MICHAEL ANGELO.

THE accession of Leo X. marked the commencement of a period wasted in fruitless labour, in bitter regrets, and more bitter sufferings, by the great Michael Angelo. It seemed to have been ordained that, from time to time, the career of this man should be like that of a torrent chafing in its channel of rocks, but afterwards bursting out more free and bright than ever. During nine years, however, the eclipse of his fortunes was unbroken, and only one incident is recorded of him; but this was one alike honourable to his spirit as an artist and to his feelings as a citizen.

The Academy of Florence had sent deputies to Leo X., petitioning him to restore to their country the ashes of Dante Alighieri, the noble and unhappy exile, who, after reviving the language and restoring the literature of Italy, had, two centuries previous, breathed his last sigh at Ravenna.

Michael Angelo relieved his long days of compulsory indolence, of sad monotony, by reading the songs of the Florentine poet, marking with his pen on the margin all the passages which struck his imagination. What an inestimable relic this volume would have been, if it had not, like Ovid's last song, been lost in the waters; for who, better than Michael Angelo, could have illustrated and interpreted Dante?

At the first intelligence which came concerning the embassy, then on its way to Rome, the artist became excited. With a generous enthusiasm, a vivid and ardent sympathy with genius, he joined at once in the work of reparation and justice. We may still read at the bottom of the original petition, preserved in the Florentine archives, these words:—"I, Michael Angelo, sculptor, address to your holiness the same prayer, and I offer to execute for the divine poet a sepulchre worthy of his memory."

And Leo X., the ostentatious Macenas, the vain patron of letters, refused this magnificent offer, and deprived the world of the monument which such an artist's memorial of the great poet would have been! But the whole Medici family, though servile historians have endeavoured to exalt them, were sordid, treacherous, and contemptible. We fully agree with the author of a brilliant article in a contemporary publication, who has assailed the betrayers of Florence upon that pedestal to which they have been raised by the worshippers of success:—"History," he says, "has agreed to reprobate the treason of Sforza and of the Visconti, but, with a traditional perverseness, continues to applaud the Medici as benefactors of Italy. They the benefactors of Italy! Florence alone, humiliated and enslaved, is a suffering memorial of their crimes. But turn from her to the pestilent Maremma of Sienna. That was a beautiful salubrious tract, until Cosmo wasted it and transformed it into a deadly marsh. Fever-breeding swamps exist in the places where the republics cultivated fertile and healthy plains. The Roman territories, from Ferrara to the Pontine Marshes, have become bare and putrid since the stagnation of industry ensuing on the decline of freedom. Cosmo dried up the fertilising springs and streams of his country, by hewing down the forests on the Tuscan Apennines. Rocky deserts now exist where the pastures in ancient times were rich with fleece, and a population of banditti derives its descent from shepherds and cultivators of the soil. If, therefore, they are benefactors who make men happy, the Medici have nothing to claim from the gratitude of mankind."

It was about this period, according to all the testimonies we can collect, that the unhappy quarrel took place between Raffaelle and Michael Angelo, the most eminent painters of their age. Angelo met his rival on the steps of the Vatican, surrounded by a crowd of scholars, and ironically exclaimed, "You march like a general at the head of his army." "And you," said the other, with fierce contempt, "go skulking alone, like an executioner." Perhaps, however, we may absolve the memory of the two great artists from much of the stain cast by this quarrel; for the fault is to be attributed to that crowd of parasites who only sought their intimacy in order to inflame their passions and flatter their pride.

Meanwhile, Leo the Tenth died suddenly, carried off by poison. If the arts in general lost a patron, Michael Angelo at least had nothing to regret. The Florentine pope had never bestowed friendship or aid upon his countryman. However, no change for the better took place. Adrian the Sixth, of Flemish origin, succeeded to the papal throne; and this was a misfortune for the painter. The new pontiff conceived the strange and barbarous resolution of pulling down the roof of the Sistine Chapel, because, he said, it looked more like the roof of a bath than of a place of worship.

It was not, therefore, with sorrow that the painter saw this pope and the next pass away—feeble princes, who never held the sacerdotal sceptre until their hands began to tremble with the weakness of approaching death. But the succession of despots was unbroken. Florence again and again threw off the yoke of those proficient traitors, the Medici; and the seventh Clement, born from that hateful stock, when his native city had once more become free, hired a host of barbarians to assail her. Their savage standards were soon perceived flying on the summits of those sun-touched hills, whence the beautiful city of Florence may be seen—a picture of delightful houses and gardens, in the glowing Italian light. Forty-four thousand men laid siege to the Tuscan capital. Less than thirteen thousand defended her walls, during eleven months, with heroic fortitude. Eight thousand patriots died in the breaches, and fourteen thousand of their enemies were buried in the plains around. Now was Michael Angelo called on to decide whether he should act as a painter or a man—whether he should offend a family of benefactors, or deny his country. He hesitated not a moment. Being named a member of the famous Council of Nine, and director of the fortifications, he proceeded round the city ramparts, and declared, that unless vast preparations were made, the usurping Medici would enter at their will. But the nobles of Florence, like true oligarchs, were already conspiring to betray the commonwealth. They complained of the sculptor's vigilance; they said he was cowardly and extravagant, because they knew he was faithful and sagacious. Their poisonous tongues prevailed. Florence was already sufficiently corrupted by her nobles to listen to their slanders. Michael Angelo, therefore, indignant and ashamed, himself opened a gate, returned to Florence, and remained in angry solitude, like Achilles in his tent. When he was gone, the Florentines repented. They sent messengers after him, by whom he was found, lonely, sad, stern, and immersed in dreams, in one of the most obscure little streets of the sea-built city. They approached him with humble deference; they prayed him to forget the slight which the provisional government had put upon him; they conjured him, in the name of liberty and of his country, to return. He at first resisted and refused, but in vain; for they pressed him again, and at length he consented. Once more, therefore, we see the artist in Florence, a general, a strategist, at the head of the defenders of his beloved city. It was too late. The last hour of Italian independence had sounded. Charles the Fifth, another of the hateful tyrants whom history flatters, had thrown his sword into the scale. The artillery, by night and by day, poured a storm upon Florence; the bravest of the citizens had already fallen. The old men and the women, pale with hunger, decimated by famine, clothed in black, and smeared with ashes, came together into the squares, or knelt in the churches, and swore they would all die rather than surrender. Michael Angelo had stationed himself on the steeple of Santo Miniato. Two guns, pointed at the besiegers and discharged incessantly, made his post conspicuous. They fired furiously at the spot. He smiled with contempt, and hung down immense draperies of cloth, which were more effectual than stone in resisting the light balls which alone could reach that elevated eyrie. Certainly, if Florence could have been saved, Angelo would have been her deliverer. Already his courage, his firmness, the resources of his mighty genius, stirred and multiplied by the heat of patriotism and the excitement of battle, had carried wonder and terror into the enemy's ranks; but Florence was even now lost. Sud-

denly a cry of sorrow arose from the streets below; women were heard shrieking; the imprecations of the soldiers were terrible. In a few moments all was explained. Malatesta had been corrupted by the Medici; the infamous Valori had sold his country. It is hard to say which was worse, the men who paid, or the man who received the nefarious price of treason? But the moral of the story would not have been complete without its sequel. A capitulation had been signed, opening the gates on condition of a general amnesty to be granted by the conquerors. Let us see how the magnificent Medici, the benefactors of Italy, kept their faith. Six of the noblest citizens were immediately beheaded; many others were condemned to exile or to the galleys. And these friends of art hunted Michael Angelo about, searched his house from the cellar to the roof, drove him from one concealment to another, until the glorious artist was compelled to hide in the lofty clock-tower of the church of San Nicholo del Arno.

At last, the Seventh Clement was artful enough to abandon the pursuit. He knew that, if he laid hands on the artist, supposing this to be possible, he would only be troubled by a new prisoner; while, if he granted him life and liberty, he would have one enemy the less, and be able to claim the praise of clemency, magnanimity, and so forth. So he pardoned Michael Angelo. And not this only. He humbled himself before him; he made him all kinds of offers and promises, on condition that he would resume his sculptor's chisel, and occupy himself without delay with the monuments to Julius the Second, and Lorenzo de Medici, that other impostor whom it was, until lately, the fashion to eulogise and admire.

On his return to Rome, a new trial awaited Michael Angelo. The representatives of the Duke of Urbino, with that tenacity which has characterised the followers of the law in all ages and countries, revived the affair of the tomb of Julius II., of which we have already in a former article given the particulars. The artist had no inclination to fall into the hands of his enemies, and so came to terms with them, by engaging to perfect the monument without further delay. He, therefore, set himself seriously to his task. The design of the mausoleum, which was originally intended to be the grandest work of the kind ever executed, had been reduced to that of a simple façade of marble upon one of the walls of "the church of St. Peter of the Bonds." The vain Julius himself had chosen the spot in which his tomb should be placed. He loved the name of the church, which had been bestowed by Sextus IV., one of the first founders of the greatness of his family. He himself had been its cardinal during thirty-two years—and, as being elected pope, had transmitted the dearly-cherished honour to his nephew. Some fatality, however, seemed to forbid the completion of the work, frequently interrupted as it had already been. Numerous influences conspired, and of the whole abortive plan, nothing but a figure of Moses was executed in a style worthy of its artist's name. And this statue, beautiful and grand as it is, has been taken from its original position, displaced from the point of view in which it appeared in its proper character, and isolated from the groups of which it was intended to form a porch; and, therefore, produces little of the impression it was intended to create. Had it been seated beside a gigantic tomb, amid a throng of prophets and sibyls, as the artist desired, it would have been an example of the solemn and grand in sculpture. Even as it is, if you enter the church at nightfall, and contemplate by the uncertain and lingering radiance of the evening that superhuman apparition, your mind cannot rest calm when the eye falls on the figure of Moses. He is seated like a demi-god of the ancients in Olympian majesty. One of his arms is extended over the table of the law; the other reposes across his breast, with the superb *nonchalance* of one who knows he has but to frown, to command obedience from the multitude. A thick and ponderous beard hangs down upon his enormous chest, like a torrent arrested in its course. The simple and primitive character of this great shepherd of a nation is typified in every development of his form—in every fold of his vesture. The double intelligence given to him, since the

divine vision on the Mount, beams from the high, broad, massive brow; and power and benevolence combined seem to speak in every lineament of the countenance.

While Michael Angelo was employed upon his "Moses," Clement VII., like Julius whom he was honouring, troubled him incessantly.

One day a messenger came to the artist, telling him that he need not expect his customary visit. Clement VII. was dead. He had leisure, just while the conclave was sitting, to elect a new pope.

Paul III. was announced. He came, with a pompous retinue of ten cardinals, to the studio of Buonarotti.

"Now," said the new pontiff, "I shall expect, Master Buonarotti, that all your time will be given up to me."

"Will your holiness pardon me?" replied the sculptor; "I have signed an engagement with the Duke of Urbino, by which I have pledged myself to complete the monumental tomb of Julius II."

"What!" cried Paul; "it is thirty years since I formed a wish, and now that I am pope I am not to gratify myself."

"But my contract, holy father—my contract."

"Come, come; I will take the responsibility of that affair upon myself. You shall execute three figures with your own hand, and other artists shall do the rest. I will answer for the Duke of Urbino's consent. And now, my master, to the Sistine Chapel; there is a great vacuum there awaiting us."

What could Michael Angelo urge against a will so positive, and so imperiously expressed? He completed, as best he could, his two statues of "Active Life" and "Contemplative Life," the symbolical Rachel and Leah of Dante; and, not daring to make any profit from an engagement he was forced to break, gave a large proportion of the sum he received himself to pay liberally the artists employed by him to execute the rest of the work. Having thus brought to a conclusion an affair which had cost him so much labour, vexation, and perplexity, he threw himself, with all his enthusiasm and his genius, into the execution of his vast design, "The Last Judgment," the painting of which occupied him during little less than nine years.

This picture, enormous and unique, represents the human figure in every conceivable attitude; it depicts every sentiment, every passion, all the infinitely-varied reflections of fancy and thought; all the impulses and workings of the soul; with an inestimable profusion of forms, tints, and tones, such as are found nowhere else within the domain of art.

In this work, Michael Angelo seems to have challenged with his courage an infinite difficulty, which his genius overcame. The object of this vast composition, the manner in which it is conceived and developed, the admirable variety and skilful distribution of the groups, the unsurpassable boldness and force of the outline, the contrasts of light and shade, the obstacles, almost insuperable, in the very nature of the design, which he appears to have assailed as if in sport, the happy power with which this prodigal variety and these innumerable details are wrought and combined into one harmonious whole—all these render "The Last Judgment" of Michael Angelo a prodigy of painting. Immense as the surface is, each part of the picture gains in effect by close study; for no cabinet-piece for the most fastidious amateur was ever more lovingly retouched, or finished to more exquisite perfection.

This magnificent work, after nearly nine years of labour, was exhibited to the public on Christmas-day, 1541. Michael Angelo was then sixty-seven years old. Several anecdotes are related in reference to his "Last Judgment."

The pope, it is said, objected to the style of representing some of the figures, and sent to tell the painter that they must be altered.

"You will tell Pope Paul," he replied, "to trouble himself less with correcting my picture, which it is easy for him to do, and to try and reform public manners, which he will find more difficult."

The master of the ceremonies of the Vatican accompanied the pope one day on a visit which his holiness paid to the studio of Michael Angelo, when "The Last Judgment" was

about half finished. This creature also would express his opinion on the work.

"Holy father," he said, "if I might utter my thoughts, I would say that this painting is more fit for a tavern-room than for the chapel of a pope."

Unhappily for the master of the ceremonies, Michael Angelo was behind him when he uttered these words, and lost not a syllable of the compliment paid him by Signor Biagio. The moment, therefore, that his visitors were gone, the artist sat down and drew a portrait of his critic; and

placed him among the "Lost Souls," under the flattering character of Midas. This was a revenge suggested, perhaps, by the practice of Dante, who punished those who offended him by consigning them to his *Inferno*.

We may imagine the misery of the poor master of the ceremonies, when he saw himself condemned in this way. He threw himself at the pope's feet, begging for deliverance, and for the punishment of the offender. But Paul professed that he had no jurisdiction. And so Michael Angelo gratified his malicious whim, and went on painting his great picture.



HALT OF THE HOLY FAMILY.—FROM A PAINTING BY DIETRICH.

GABRIEL METZU.

To have seen a few pictures of Metzu, of Terburg, or of Gaspar Netächer, is to have acquired fresh knowledge of the manners of the Dutch citizen of the time of the Stadholder, of his costume, of his physiognomy, of his courtesies, of his mode of life, and even of his style of thinking; and this knowledge is to be gained from such a study, as well as from history and description. To be sure, the painting would be unintelligible without the book; for the pencil would create mysteries without the pen, though it is the fashion among the critics of art to say that their craft is superior to that of the writer. But what would a whole gallery, as vast as the Vatican, of historical portraits be worth, if the biographies of the individuals did not exist? What would all the Sculptures in Nineveh tell us, if the sacred and the classic records did

not interpret their mystical tongue? What frescoes could have told us Roman history, if Livy had not written? or what painter could have left such a familiarity with old Spanish manners as we have derived from the literary pictures of Cervantes? We cannot, therefore, agree with the few artists who are able to write at all, that whole libraries of information are rendered superfluous by the paintings of one master. No one will suspect us of a wish to depreciate a branch of art, but it is just to that art itself to remember its office, and not to claim the dominion in a realm which belongs to another genius. From a picture we may learn the fashion of a mantle or a boot, the style of ornamenting a chimney-piece or a chair, the mode of wearing a beard or a wig; but the spirit and moral of all valuable history is still reserved